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Gallot: Lawmakers want redistricting process to be open

BY HEATHER REGAN WHITE

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SULPHUR — State lawmakers plan to keep the upcoming redistricting process as transparent as possible, state Rep. Rick Gallot told the West Calcasieu Association of Commerce on Thursday.

The redrawing of election district boundaries is based on U.S. Census Bureau data on population shifts and happens every 10 years.

Gallot said the work will affect the U.S. House, the state Supreme Court, the Public Service Commission and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The state's House and Governmental Affairs Committee, which Gallot heads, is responsible for initial plan development. Public hearings will be held throughout the state in the early part of next year to allow representatives to hear from constituents.

A special session, set for the end of March, will allow lawmakers to get the plan ready for review by the U.S. Department of Justice by May 2.

Louisiana must seek the review based on nondiscrimination provisions in the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The Justice Department will have 60 days to study the plan. Gallot said that if the plan isn't ready by the deadline, another special session may have to be called after the regular session, which runs April 25-June 23. If it's still not ready, a panel of three federal judges "will do it for us," he said.

Gallot said redistricting aims to allot equal populations for each district. He said that "the deviation from that should be as close to zero as practicable."

Because the state is losing a congressional seat, there will be six districts, each representing 778,780 people.

He said judicial districts don't have to follow the same distribution requirements because "judges don't represent people."

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GALLOT